

Keep your eye on George Bush

By Godfrey Sperling Jr.

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George Bush, while hardly anyone is noticing, is becoming a leading "early runner" in what is still only the faint beginnings of the 1980 race for the GOP presidential nomination.

While Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan must be called the favorites for the nomination, Mr. Bush is out in front in putting a formidable organization in place.

Mr. Bush, as party chairman a few years ago, established strong ties with GOP political activists all across the nation. And during the last year he has been renewing and rewarming these relationships while traveling to 36 states and participating in 98 events in support of Republican candidates.

In recent weeks Monitor checks with prominent Republicans around the United States have shown that not only are influential leaders aligning themselves with Mr. Bush but these Bush supporters are also already beginning to fulfill their first function: they are "talking up" their man for the presidency.

This is particularly apparent in New Hampshire, site of the first presidential primary, and also in Massachusetts, Vermont, and Connecticut, additional New England states that follow with primaries soon after New Hampshire's.

Political reporters going into those states to write stories will hear a great deal about Mr. Bush and how he's the Republicans' "man of destiny." At least some of the key Republicans they naturally will talk to are already "Bush people," who will, again quite naturally, give Bush a boost.

But reporters will see more of an organization starting to move into place for Bush than for any other potential candidate. So they will be reporting what they see as well as what they hear.

It is not difficult to put together a persuasive scenario in which Mr. Bush — onetime Texas congressman, UN Ambassador, U.S. liaison with Peking, CIA director, as well as GOP national chairman — does, indeed, win the nomi-

nation. It goes like this:

First, he wins the important preprimary caucus state of Iowa, picking up the same early momentum from this that Jimmy Carter did. This is very possible. Mr. Bush is concentrating on Iowa. He has strong political friends there.

Then Mr. Bush goes on to win in New Hampshire and in the other New England primaries. He was born in Massachusetts and grew up in Connecticut, where his father was a United States Senator. He is a Yale graduate and has school-tie relationships with men and women of influence throughout New England. Thus, there will be lots of political help for Mr. Bush in that region by people who can, as it is said, "do him a lot of good."

New England victories would give Mr. Bush what political analysts term the "flow of momentum," the element that Mr. Carter had going for him very early in his 1976 campaign.

The Florida and North Carolina primaries would be musts for Bush. But in these races his years as a "Southerner" — from Texas — might well help him along.

In fact, before he reaches the Texas primary (though the state legislature may decide not to hold one in 1980) Mr. Bush could have the nomination wrapped up. But even if he hasn't, his momentum could well win him that state, too. Look at it this way:

Would Texans turn their back on someone they had known, voted for, and elected to office, and who had by this time, almost locked up the nomination? Further, if John Connally and Ronald Reagan are the other candidates, it could be argued that these two would cut into each other's vote — and this would help Bush win there.

Actually, there are polls that indicate Tex-

ans would prefer Bush over Connally — that Connally holds an adverse image among many Texans, particularly among the younger Republicans.

But if Bush got by Texas, he would likely be unstoppable.

The one development that could end the Bush-for-President effort before it even gets started is for Gerald Ford to decide to get out and aggressively seek the nomination. Under those circumstances Mr. Bush would likely bow out in favor of his old friend.

But Ford and Bush have talked, and the former President has given Bush the go-ahead to seek the nomination. So Bush, although still an unannounced candidate, has jumped into the race. It's really too early to say so. But we are saying it. Mr. Bush may go all the way.

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